

~~TOP SECRET~~

CONFIDENTIAL

NSC BRIEFING

6 September 1956

CONSEQUENCES OF UK-FRENCH MILITARY ACTION (SNIE 30-4-56)

- I. The IAC has just passed on an estimate of the probable repercussions of British-French military action against Egypt. We did not estimate whether the UK and France would in fact take such action. However, we felt there were enough indications that such might be the case to warrant this study. Its principal findings are:

CONFIDENTIAL

DOCUMENT NO. 9
NO CHANGE IN CLASS. ☐
☐ DECLASSIFIED
CLASS. CHANGED TO: TS S 6 1996
NEXT REVIEW DATE:
AUTH: HR 70-2
DATE 1-1990 REVIEWER:

25X1

25 YEAR RE-REVIEW

~~TOP SECRET~~

- I. Unless the USSR provided substantial numbers of personnel for combat duty beforehand--which we think unlikely--the British and French could seize key points along the canal within about 24 hours and assure their military control of the canal within a week. It would take three to ten days from the initial assault to overcome organized Egyptian military opposition and occupy Cairo and other main centers in northern Egypt.
- II. There would be various short-range difficulties--which the British and French could probably overcome:
 - A. They probably couldn't prevent Egyptian sabotage of the canal--we cannot foresee how long it would take to clear it.

~~TOP SECRET~~

- B. There would probably be widespread anti-Western rioting in Cairo, Alexandria and elsewhere.
 - C. There would probably be substantial guerrilla activity--though this would probably be suppressed within a few weeks.
- IV. However, even after essential order was restored, the British and French would still have major problems on their hands:
- A. Small-scale but widespread sabotage and terrorism and manifest Egyptian restiveness under military occupation would continue.
 - B. Nasser would probably set up a government-in-exile to direct this activity and furnish a basis for UN action.

~~TOP SECRET~~

C. Finally, no new government could last long once British and French troops withdrew:

1. As a result the occupation would have to be prolonged.

V. The Arab reaction would be violent:

- A. Anti-Western riots, endangering US personnel and installations, would break out in most population centers. Danger would exist even in Saudi Arabia and Iraq, where the security forces would probably move more promptly than elsewhere to restore order.
- B. Widespread sabotage of oil facilities and other Western installations would be attempted by Egyptian agents and sympathizers, with the danger greatest in Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon.

1. Though the Iraq Petroleum Company would probably be the main initial target, US installations might suffer damage.
- C. All Arab governments--including the many opposed to Nasser--would have to take a pro-Egyptian stand, though they would not send troops to Nasser and would try to avoid a major break with West.
1. For example, even Iraq might withdraw from the Baghdad Pact.
- D. If the Egyptians somehow succeed in prolonging resistance, risks of mob violence and governmental action against the West would increase throughout the Arab world.
- VI. Israel would probably stay on the sidelines unless a major breakdown of authority in Jordan or Syria opened an opportunity for border "rectification".

VII. The USSR would probably avoid direct involvement in the fighting and would probably have little chance to send additional military supplies or technicians to Egypt.

VIII. However, the USSR would exploit and probably seek to organize strong adverse reactions likely to take place throughout the Arab-Asian world and among various NATO members.

- A. Though this reaction would be reduced if Nasser had without provocation cut off canal traffic, few Asians could condone the use of force.
- B. If the British-French military action were taken on the basis of Egyptian rejection of the London Conference proposals, a General Assembly majority would probably vote for condemnation of the UK and France.

~~TOP SECRET~~

- IX. The more violent of the manifestations of the Arab-Asian emotionalism would sooner or later subside.
- A. Self-interest of states dependent on Western oil revenues and subsidies would emerge as restraining factor.
 - B. In local political situations, pro-Egyptian elements would suffer from loss of Cairo's support.
 - C. With removal of Nasser from the scene, the nationalist drive on the special Western position in the Middle East might be temporarily checked.
- X However, basic resentment and suspicion of the West would be magnified for years to come, especially among Arabs, but also in the rest of the Arab-Asian world.

~~TOP SECRET~~

- A. The USSR would almost certainly take advantage of new opportunities provided for extending its economic penetration, building up cultural and diplomatic ties, and spreading the concept that the interests of the underdeveloped countries lie more with the Bloc than with the West.
- B. Though the use of military force would not of itself fatally weaken the Western position, the problem of establishing normal and mutually advantageous relationships with Arab-Asian states would be greatly magnified.
- 31. The US could not completely avoid adverse reactions in the Arab-Asian world by attempting to disassociate itself from the British-French action.

11-

~~TOP SECRET~~

CONFIDENTIAL

- A. Unless it flatly condemned the action, many Arabs and Asians would still be convinced of US involvement.
- B. Even among those convinced of US non-involvement, many would attribute the US position to irresolution and expediency, rather than to real sympathy for the ex-colonial nations.

CONFIDENTIAL